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Barcia Press Release

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April 24 Officially Recognized As Michigan Bone Marrow and Blood Stem Cell Transplant Awareness Day

Transplant procedure saves former state legislator's life

LANSING – Members of the State Legislature and Granholm administration today officially recognized April 24, 2003 as Michigan Bone Marrow and Blood Stem Cell Transplant Awareness Day.

Senator Jim Barcia (D-Bay City) joined Rep. Joseph Rivet (D-Bay City); MI Surgeon General Dr. Kimberlydawn Wisdom; Bay County Executive and former State Rep. Tom Hickner; and Dr. James Ferrara, director of the Blood and Marrow Transplant Program at the U of M Cancer Center to celebrate the observance's formal resolution and proclamation, recognize new developments in treating life-threatening blood diseases, and encourage citizens to register as bone marrow and blood stem cell donors.

"No one is immune from cancer's devastating effects," Barcia said. "But by taking a simple blood test, we can save friends and family members from this and many other crippling diseases. Hospitals have the technology to cure these illnesses, but they can't do it without the generous gift of life from kind-hearted donors."

Rivet said, "I encourage all residents of Michigan to participate in honoring those who have donated by following their heroic example. Thanks to the miracle of modern medicine and the selfless act of a donor, the health of my friend Tom Hickner has dramatically improved."

Current Bay County Executive and former State Rep. Tom Hickner was diagnosed with chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia four years ago. In January, he was admitted to the University of Michigan Hospital for an elective bone marrow stem cell transplant. Hickner's brother provided the cells used in the procedure.

Hickner said, "I'm alive today thanks to my brother's donor cells and the outstanding doctors who performed this remarkable transplant procedure. I encourage everyone to become a registered donor because the power to save a life is inside each one of us."

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Michigan Surgeon General Dr. Kimberlydawn Wisdom said, “Governor Granholm has been proud to join with the members of the Legislature to officially recognize the importance of Michigan Bone Marrow and Blood Stem Cell Transplant Awareness Day. As a physician, I have seen firsthand the devastating effects of cancer. I have also seen the life-saving benefits of these transplants, and urge all Michigan citizens to learn more about how to become registered donors.”

Bone marrow and blood stem cell transplants are used to cure blood-related cancers and other disorders by replacing the patient's diseased blood cell production system with a new one generated by powerful, versatile blood-forming stem cells.

The stem cells can come either from the patients themselves, or from a relative or an unrelated volunteer. Cells can be harvested either from the bloodstream or from the marrow of the donor's hip bones. The donor's white blood cell type must match the recipient's cell type as closely as possible for the greatest chance of success. Many patients in need of a bone marrow or stem cell transplant wait for months or years until a suitable match is found, but national registries and local donation campaigns are helping to speed the process.

Dr. James Ferrara, director of the Bone Marrow and Stem Cell Transplant Program at the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center, said, “We've made remarkable strides in blood and marrow transplant techniques in recent years, so that it is often a first-line therapy for patients and no longer a treatment of last resort. But we still face challenges that can only be surmounted through continued research and increased donor awareness. My colleagues and I at all of Michigan's bone marrow and blood stem cell transplant centers are grateful for the state's effort to educate the public.”

While significant progress has been made in the treatment of cancer and other devastating diseases, saving lives often depends on the availability of bone marrow and blood stem cell volunteer donors.

- More than 30,000 people annually—including more than 1,000 Michigan citizens--are diagnosed with leukemia or other life-threatening blood disorders that can now be successfully treated with a bone marrow or blood stem cell transplant.
- Of the thousands of people annually who require blood or tissue donations, nearly 70 percent of these patients will not find a suitable donor in their family.

For more information on how to become a bone marrow and blood stem cell volunteer donor, visit the National Marrow Donor Program Web site at www.marrow.org. Donors must be between the ages of 18 to 60 and will be asked to take a simple blood test to get on the national donor registry list.

Editor's Note: For audio clips and photos from the press conference, please visit <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/dem/jimbarcia/press.htm>

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